

## Considerations for Meal Pattern Flexibility during Closures due to COVID-19

Sponsors of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) operating authorized non-congregate emergency meal distribution may apply to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to request targeted and specific changes to the meal patterns based on **disruptions to the availability of food products** resulting from the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19. The CSDE expects and strongly encourages sponsors to maintain and meet each Program's meal pattern to the greatest extent possible.

### When to Submit a Meal Pattern Waiver Application

Sponsors should submit a waiver application if any of the conditions below applies.

- There has been a disruption to the sponsor's supply of products used to meet the meal pattern requirements.
- There is a sudden change in the availability of products ordered to meet the meal pattern requirements.
- Reduced staffing levels have affected operations related to producing and packaging the required amounts of fruits and vegetables to meet the meal pattern requirements.

To request a meal pattern waiver application, please contact the CSDE's [school nutrition programs staff](#) or [CACFP staff](#).

### When Not to Submit a Meal Pattern Waiver Application

Sponsors should not submit a waiver application:

- to attempt to cut costs by eliminating a component;
- based on the belief that there may be **future issues** with orders and deliveries; or
- for convenience.

### What to Include in the Application

The sponsor's waiver application must:

- be **specific** regarding what foods the district or school cannot serve. For example, a request to waive the required vegetable subgroups for the SSO must indicate which subgroups are not available; and
- include the **explanation and justification** (such as the lack of supply or distribution) for why the district or school cannot serve one or more food components to meet the meal pattern requirements.

Sponsors should carefully consider **all available crediting options and appropriate substitutions** within a meal pattern component before requesting a waiver for the entire component. For example, if fresh fruit is not available or the sponsor does not have sufficient staff to portion canned fruit, the

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sponsor could substitute juice or dried fruit. For guidance on crediting foods within each meal pattern component, review the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs*.

### Meal Pattern Requirements

The sponsor's waiver request must be for a targeted and specific change to the meal patterns based on disruptions to the availability of food products resulting from the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19. With the exception of the specific change in a CSDE-approved waiver, emergency meals in the SFSP, SSO, and CACFP must follow the appropriate meal pattern and must include all components. Offer versus serve (OVS) is not allowed for emergency meals.

- **SSO Sponsors:** Sponsors distributing emergency meals under the SSO must follow the [meal pattern requirements](#) for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Sponsors should make every effort to plan menus that meet the USDA's meal patterns, based on the meal pattern for the **predominate age group expected at each site**. For example, the K-8 meal pattern may be the most appropriate for providing meals at emergency serving sites.
- **SFSP Sponsors:** Sponsors distributing emergency meals under the SFSP may follow the [SFSP meal pattern](#) or the SSO meal pattern.
- **CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Sponsors:** Sponsors that are also NSLP sponsors may follow the [NSLP meal patterns](#) or [CACFP meal patterns](#).

For questions or additional guidance, please contact the CSDE's [school nutrition programs staff](#) or [CACFP staff](#).

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Operation of Child Nutrition Programs during Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Outbreaks](#) webpage, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) or [CACFP staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/CSDE\\_Meal\\_Pattern\\_Waiver\\_Considerations.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/COVID-19/CSDE_Meal_Pattern_Waiver_Considerations.pdf).

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1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
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- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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